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ABSTRACT

This paper describes early childhood education programs in Sweden, focusing on their history and development, administration, goals and objectives, admissions policies, structure, expenditures, program of activities, facilities, staffing, daily routine, problems and criticisms. Beginning in 1902, legislation provided for the care of abused and foster children. Government involvement increased steadily, blossoming in the 1960s and '70s when labor shortages, increased interest in women's roles and emphasis on enrichment of the preschool environment led to the establishment of a law requiring municipalities to offer free preschool services. Day care administration presently starts at the national level with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Individual child centers are run by municipalities, which, though fairly autonomous, must implement state decisions and regulations. The theoretical base of preschool education in Sweden is a combination of theories and practices from Germany, Britain, and the U.S. In addition to meeting the needs of children, centers are designed to meet parental needs. The centers also serve the society's goal of eliminating class distinctions. Many center staff members are politically radical and ideologically oriented in their work at the centers. Different forms of child care are available with the daghem, or day home, being the most common and structured. Problems in the system include high staff turnover, inadequate coordination between the centers and educational institutions, and a lack of parental involvement. Criticisms include concern over the amount of time children spend at the centers, and differing views as to the role of the centers. (SB)

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INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND SOCIALIZATION IN SWEDEN

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Paper Presented at the Annual National Conference of the Association for Childhood Education International, Salt Lake City, April 13, 1976

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History and Development

The history and development of child care activities and pre-school education in Sweden parallel the economic,political, ideological, pedagogic, and social welfare development in the country. Swedish society and state considered it crucial to provide for needy children as early as 1902. Early in this century nursery schools were available for orphans, children of the poor and children of "fallen women". Today pre-schools, day nurseries and nursery schools are demanded, respected and utilized by all segments of the population. They serve the majority of more than 700,000 pre-school age children in the country. Day Care Centers do not only meet an expressed need but offer a unique opportunity to children as well. Quality Day Care Centers are taken for granted as another form of social service for all segments of society. The concept enjoys both ideological and monetary support by all. Yet the program did not just happen, people had to work and struggle for it. The 1968 Commission on Child Centers state:

> The responsibility for the upbringing of children rests chiefly with the home. The community has, however, to a great extent undertaken a responsibility within this field, among other ways through the provision of child centres by local authorities. Changes in the family structure and living conditions have brought a greatly increased demand for public measures to assist parents with the care of their children. In increasing numbers of families both parents go out to work. For unmarried and divorced parents organized child care is a condition for their ability to support the family by paid work. Child centres also fulfill an important educational function in teaching children group activities under pedagogic guidance.
>
> Furthermore, it is believed that in cultural and democratic terms, a system of day nurseries and kindergartens would compensate many children with culturally deprived home backgrounds by giving them a more stimulating environment away from home. (Profile of Sweden, p. 100)

Two important acts were adopted in 1902. One empowered the community to intervene in the case of child abuse. The other set regulations for the care of foster children. This "community care" of children was expanded in a public assistance act in 1918; the act provided all sorts of help to children under 15. A 1924 Act further expanded communal (state) intervention, responsibility, and role in child care. The coming of Social Democrats to power in the 1930's provided a major impetus for societal responsibility for and intervention in child care for all children. A Population Commission was formed in 1935. This Commission made a complete inventory of children in Sweden and made recommendations for child care with particular emphasis on the pedagogical significance of preschool education. World War II brought the need for female labor. Therefore, in 1944 the government provided grants both for full and half-time pre-school facilities for children. A Semi-Open Child-Care Commission was appointed and it reported in 1950. Although a recession in the 1950's set the work of this

Commission back, nevertheless, its report constituted a major and comprehensive blueprint for future action in the area (Rosengren, 1973).

Toward the end of the 1950's the socioeconomic conditions in Sweden turned in favor of child-care activities. The 1960's were years of major development and expansion for the Swedish child care system. The Child Welfare Act of 1961 provided the state with legal authority and responsibility for serving children and youth in the country. This act also created local municipal Child Welfare Boards charged specifically with organizing, coordinating, and administering all child care services in their respective localities.

Labor shortage in the early 60's motivated labor organizations to support government involvement in child care activities. It was intended and hoped that more women would be freed and enter the labor force. A Central Committee for Cooperation was formed in 1963. Its task was to study this problem and come up with specific proposals. During this period the report The Status of Women in Sweden: Report to the United Nations, 1968 was made public on the status of women in Sweden and it recommended greater role for women in the nation's life. The provision of child care facilities was one of the ways such involvement could be realized.

The 1960's was also the decade when great emphasis was placed on providing an enriched environment for pre-school children. The works of Piaget, Montessori, Erikson, and Gessell gave further impetus to the program by underscoring the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of the child. The child was seen as an active agent of his/her learning and an enriched environment was considered essential for providing the stimuli for overall growth and maturation.

The Royal Commission Study on Child Centers was established at this time. The Commission is responsible for the continued development of child care activities and for informing the public about the program.

As of 1963 the state began paying the local authorities on per child basis. In 1966 the government made provision for full-time child care centers for qualified children. On December 12, 1973 the Riksdag, the Swedish Parliament, passed the New Pre-School Activities Act which went into effect in July, 1975. This Act requires all municipalities to provide free pre-school services to all five and six year olds who want to use them. Furthermore, municipal authorities must inform and educate the parents about pre-school services. Attendance is not mandatory however. Three-hour attendance per day is available for free for all five and six year olds and for younger children with special needs.

Administration

Organizationally the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in Stockholm as the supreme body is responsible for all preschool activities and services in the country. The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare sets the general regulations and guidelines for all child care facilities. These include standards of physical facilities, staff/child ratio, grouping, health and sanitation conditions, and overall direction. The central government also provides the construction cost and 20-30% of the operating budget. The money comes largely from the State Inheritance Fund, money left by people with no heirs. State subsidies vary from location to location.

At the regional level the County Administrator is responsible for the supervision of the program. The 278 counties maintain and support medical and child welfare facilities for all children, especially in municipalities lacking such facilities.

Locally most child care centers are run by the municipalities (communes), the local governments. While fairly autonomous, the municipalities must implement state decisions in education, social welfare, city planning, and health. The Child Centers, under social welfare, is one area in which the state requires municipal involvement. The expenditure of the municipalities come primarily from the municipal income tax. Fifteen percent of the municipal budget is allocated to child and welfare services. Each of the some 1000 municipalities has a Child Welfare and Social Services Committee.

The Swedish Child Welfare Act of 1961 makes provisions for child care, promoting child development, and for the provision of ideal conditions for the children's upbringing. This Act requires each municipality to have a Child Welfare Board and to be responsible for about 80% of child-centered activities. The Board is a lay organization consisting of about five members elected by municipal officials. The Board uses the expert services of the local resource people. Its main function is "general preventive child welfare". This means keeping data on the children, studying their living conditions, identifying any unfavorable conditions in the children's environment, providing adequate recreation facilities for children and young people, support of youth clubs and organizations, summer camps and holiday homes, general child services for all children, intervention in family life where children are hurt in any way, and the implementation of legal codes related to children's lives.

Goals and Objectives

Swedish child experts (Rosengren, 1973) feel that Sweden does not have a set theory of developmental psychology which covers the overall development of the child. Therefore, they have adopted an eclectic approach utilizing theories and practices developed by German, British, and American theoreticians and practitioners. It is believed that a child's ability to optimally utilize his/her opportunities depends upon three interrelated "fields of competncy" namely ego-comprehension, conceptual formation, and communication. Rosengren states that "... no psychological approach to the child's development can exist in a vacuum. The approach must always be related to the community in which the child lives and its values." (Rosengren, p. 22). Thus the following subsidiary objectives have been developed against that background. The realization of the objectives depend on adult-child contact, the organizational model, the total environmental structure, and the resources available. The objectives are stated as follows:

> The preschool, together with the parents, shall provide conditions in which the child can develop and stabilize a conception of itself as an individual. This is a necessary foundation for the child subsequently to be able to cooperate in various respects with others.
>
> The preschool shall provide favourable conditions for the child successively to develop its communicative ability in interplay with its environment. The child should become increasingly aware of all its innate means of expression, exploiting them in words, sounds, movement, and images.

> The preschool shall provide the conditions necessary for a favourable conceptual approach to emerge in the child, so that it, prior to the commencement of its schooling, understands fundamental concepts, and understands a certain interplay between concepts and simple system relationships. The child is to acquire not primarily knowledge but a method of learning; it is to acquire a capacity to utilize concepts in the solution of problems, and in creative activity. (Rosengren, 1973, pp. 22-23)

Eve Moberg (1971) states that the nuclear family and apartment dwelling constitute an inadequate environment for children's growth and maturity. She adds that babysitters or grandmothers are inadequate substitutes for parents and/or day-care experiences. Half of the Swedish families with children have only one child. While stressing the significance of day-care centers she asserts that they do not exist to serve the economy or the labor market, their prime justification, she says, is and must be the children. A committee headed by Alva Myrdal recognized this fact and suggested universal day-care services in the 1930's.

Emerging objectives of the day-care centers are stated thusly.

> It should help to make children responsible adult members of society, capable of empathy, consideration for and cooperation with others. It should in different ways compliment the family in giving every child optimal conditions for social, emotional, physical and intellectual development. (Kaare, 1972, p. 2)

There is slightly more emphasis on the pedagogic aspect now. The trend is more and more in the direction of the English Infant Schools (Silberman, 1970). This does not imply a de-emphasis on the social development of the children.

Broader Goals

Day care centers are intended to serve a variety of goals and objectives. They are meant to meet the needs of the children, the parents, the staff, the state, and that of society. This may and does present problems. As far as children go, the program stresses the cognitive, emotional, social, linguistic, and physical development of the children. Day care staff also pays great attention to ego-development and positive self-image among children. Other areas of concern are conceptualization, learning how to learn, communication skills, cooperation, conservation, autonomy, equality, freedom, self-respect, self-reliance, self-expression, empathy, openness, mutual respect, trust, spontaniety, solidarity, and sharing. The program also makes provisions for achieving harmony within and between children as well as among nations. Internationalization begins at the pre-school level in Sweden. Day cares are equipped to meet these and other needs among children.

Although very child-centered, Swedish Day Cares are expected and meant to meet other needs as well. They must serve the parents. Sweden may have the highest number of single parents, one-child families, families living in apartments, working parents, and unmarried parents. (Tomasson, 1970). These are normal and accepted features of life in the country. This means that someone else must take care of the children. In the highly organized, bureaucratized, institutionalized, and planned welfare state of Sweden the responsibility falls

on the Day Care Centers. Parents feel very comfortable with entrusting their children to Day Care Centers. They perceive the Day Care Centers as places where their children enjoy the benefits of a safe, rich, comfortable, and playful physical plant, the company of other children and the services of warm, compassionate, dedicated and competent staff. Many parents do not only view the Day Cares as substitute homes but also as an expanded and richer environment. This is especially the case with disadvantaged children. Day Cares free the parents to pursue individual interests or to work.

In addition to fulfilling parental and institutional demands, many staff members attempt to meet their own needs through the children. Many young people are critical of many aspects of their society. They complain about the Swedes being overly rational, aloof, reserved, self-centered, materialistic, contented, and so on. The leftists feel that the Social Democratic Party has betrayed the cause of socialism and that socialism itself if not enough anyway. They would like to achieve true communism and a convivial (Illich, 1973) social order. I found most of them aware, sophisticated, committed, and ideologically oriented. They are committed to recreating a new social order by socializing the children differently.

Finally, Day Care Centers are designed of course to meet the following societal needs. Sweden is trully committed to equality among its people. Sweden definitely has its upper, middle, and lower classes which they call Group I, II, and III. The country even has its "invisible poor". Day Care Centers are designed to minimize, if not eliminate, class distinctions among children. They are to remove the detrimental effects of socioeconomic and ethnic influences on children. Educational input is equalized. Sweden also considers all children as the most precious resource and commodity of any society. The country invests heavily in child care even at the prenatal stage. Society provides well for the children's total needs. Furthermore, Sweden is committed to full employment. This is a crucial national goal; current unemployment is less than 2%. Day Care Centers free some adults, especially mothers, for work while providing jobs at the same time. In addition to that, Day Care Centers tend to influence most or all children in similar ways. This helps meet society's need for homogeniety. Swedes get uncomfortable with heterogeniety of any kind. And finally, the provision of mass child care services is very much in line with the country's institutionalized and welfare state policy.

Different forms of child-care is available to most children between the ages of six months and seven years.

First, the family day-care, where a trained and certified woman, whether or not she has her own children, takes care of children in her home, she is called "day mother".

Second, the three child system where a child nurse takes care of children from three families, rotating between the families. Both activities are controlled and funded by the government.

Third, Child centers - a term used to describe all group programs for preschool children. This includes day nurseries, nursery schools and leisure time centers.

Fourth, Day nurseries - full day programs that operate for five or more hours a day for children six months to seven years of age.

Fifth, Play schools - programs that operate three hours a day. The program serves mainly five and six year old children.

Sixth, Leisure time or free time centers - programs that provide before and after school care for children age seven to fourteen.

Seventh, Early child care - day care programs - programs that offer group-based care for five or more hours a day to children ranging in age from six months to three years.

Eighth, Group-based or center-based care - care for children outside of a home or family environment.

Some of this is institutional, some is not. The Pre-school Activities Act of 1973 restructured all the institutionalized child-care centers into two main categories. Day Nurseries or daghem, literally meaning "day home", are places where children from six months to seven years old spend anywhere from five hours to the entire day Forskola or pre-school, is the place where five and six year olds spend part of the day. Daghem is more child-care oriented while Forskola is more pedagogically inclined. Often, they are one and the same, located in one place. Both convey the essence and meaning of "day-care" and/or "child-center". This paper deals mainly with the daghem, dayhome or daycare. This of course is not the only type but the most common and structured type of daycare which Sweden is famous for.

Admissions

Day Care Centers serve children from six months to seven year olds from all socioeconomic and ethnic groups. This includes handicapped and immigrant children. Handicapped and disadvantaged children are given priority over others. Priority is given to children from single parents where the parent is either working or studying; children with handicaps and medical problems; children from disorganized families; immigrant children; children from low-income (group III) families; and children from families where both parents are studying or working. Such priorities were established for three reasons. First, to equalize educational opportunities for children. Second, day care facilities are viewed as complimentary to family life. Third, day care services free single parents to pursue personal interests and meet other needs. About 40% of the children come from this category.

Structure

Most day-care centers serve a mixture of children ranging from six months to seven years. The stress is on vertical grouping and pairing called "Brother and Sister Group". Children up to two-and-a-half years are placed together. Most children are at the day-care center full time. But in some cases children spend part of the day at the center. Five and six year olds spend three hours at the center. In many cases seven to twelve year olds spend pre and after school hours at the day-care centers too. These children use the facilities until their parents come home from work. Day Care Centers are open from 6:30 A.M. to 6:30 P.M. five days a week and in some cases on weekends too.

Expenditures

As far as costs go the central government pays 30%, the municipalities 60%, and the parents 10%. The average per year cost per child ranges from about $2,600-$3,700. Staff qualification and adult-child ratio are the crucial determining factors in costs. The family's contribution ranges from twenty cents to five dollars per day. This depends on the family's income, size and the number of children it has in the day care. Budget is divided into 70% staff salaries, 18% building and food, and 12% other. Table I shows budget analysis for a day nursery serving ten two-year olds, twelve three and four-year olds, and fifteen five and six-year olds.

TABLE I
BUDGET ANALYSIS FOR A SWEDISH DAY NURSERY

Staff - director, preschool teachers, child nurse, cook, cleaning staff, doctor	58.5%
Staff benefits	13.2%
Expenditures such as outdoor equipment, sand, disposable diapers, toilet paper	.4%
New items such as plates, curtains	.1%
Children's materials and food	7.7%
Administrative items - includes telephone, stamps	.3%
Repair and general upkeep	.5%
Insurance for children and building	.1%
Upkeep of buildings, including large electrical items, cleaning and watering of building	17.2%
Yearly payment on loan	2.0%

Source: J.L. Bergstrom and J. R. Gold. Sweden's Day Nurseries, Washington,D.C. 1974

Program of Activities

There is no organized program or curriculum at the Day Care Centers. There is no set schedule either. No special effort is made to "teach" the basic skills", "shapes and colors" or any kind of content. The staff will and does answer any questions the children ask. There is considerable dyadic interaction between adults and children. Experiential learning is the operative mode. Children take field trips, nature walks, and so on. Staff members implement Freire's "problem-posing" method of education. There is also considerable emphasis on the staff serving as role models for whatever skills or behavior they would like to see in

children. They eat, relax, walk, paint, cook, and nap with the children. With an adult-child ratio of from 1:3 to 1:8 individualization is more feasible and observable. One observes a tutor-tutee type of relationship. Every activity is built on the children's expressed need and desire. I witnessed teachers teaching these little children about crime, criminals, jails, death and dying, birth, sexuality, religion and cars. The teachers were using books, models, etc. to "teach" these. "Instructional" time resembles the true open classroom (Kohl, 1969) in every way.

Language development is also dealt with informally. The stress is on the spoken language. Adults talk to and with children on one-to-one basis. Adults try to deal with individual children while maintaining group harmony and wellbeing.

Opportunities are provided for drawing, painting, clay modelling, singing, dancing, dramatikcs, cooking, etc.

Plant and Facilities

A typical Day Care Center looks like a large house. It looks very noninstitutional, inside and outside. It is clean, comfortable, safe, pleasant and rich in facilities. It is well decorated with children's art as well as standard art work. It is well-furnished and the furniture is pleasing and comfortable. Everything except the walls and adult-related objects are scaled down. The kitchen and food are very "homey". There is an abundance of toys, books and equipment for large and small motor activity. There is also a piano, a record player, a sewing machine, a kitchenette, showers and industrial arts equipment. The children have their own towels, mattresses, or cribs as the case may be. There are many rooms suited and equipped for various activities. There is even a room for changing clothes, with closets and a sofa on the floor for changing shoes. Everything is designed and arranged to maximize the children's comfort, safety and sense of exploration. There is a variety of equipment and facilities for indoor and outdoor play. Children are encouraged to use these. Some washrooms are expanded and equipped for water and sand play. There are special small rooms for rest and relaxation by staff and children. The walls and furnishings have different textures and colors. All the Day Care Centers that I visited were in one-story buildings. A typical Day Care Center is hardly distinguishable from its surrounding buildings.

Staffing

The staff of an average Day Care Center or preschool consists of the director, preschool teacher(s), child nurse(s), free time pedagogue(s), cooks and maintenance workers. There may also be some interns in training. The staff works forty hours per week. The average salary is 3400 Swedish Krowns (about $800) per month. Currently about 90% of the day-care staff consists of women. In order to attract more men they have set up "free quotas" and there is consideration of other incentives for all. Four month practical experience is required for admission to training. Pre-school teachers are high school (gymnasium) graduates who go through two years of training at Forskoleseminarie. While child nurses are trained in the special stream of the Swedish high schools or Folk High Schools. Child nurses receive 34 weeks of further training beyond high school. Pre-service training consists of a balance between theory and practice. The child observation training program includes voice, social psychology, music, media, art, drama, pedagogy, philosophy, psychiatry, child-development, Swedish and humanistic psychology. Students read

Piaget, Erickson, Herbert Mead, Gesell, Froebel, and Montesorri. Training is heavily field and competency based. Team work and child participation are stressed. I found the staff relaxed, affectionate, dedicated, radical, and competent.

Daily Routine

Some staff member opens the facilities at 6 A.M. The children are brought by parents beginning at 6:30. They play, sleep, warm up, socialize, change, or talk to the teachers. Breakfast is served at 8 A.M. After that each staff member and his/her group of children decide what to do. The morning is spent on a variety of activities. Lunch is served at 11:30. Everyone, including teachers, take a nap. This is followed by quiet activities. Children eat snacks at 3:00. Children engage in free play or a variety of things for the rest of the afternoon. At about 5:00 parents begin to arrive to pick up their children. Dinner is served to those who need it. The Center closes at 6:30 p.m.

The children are healthy, well-dressed and well-fed. They are happy, gregarious, and dynamic. Studies and observations document the many positive effects of day-care centers on children. The children become much more open-minded, autonomous, democratic, cooperative, communicative, and skilled. However, it is suspected that by the third grade in the comprehensive school the academic gains of the pre-school may be wiped out.

Problems and Criticism

The Swedish Day Care System is not without its problems however. Below is a brief listing of some of the problems. There is a high turnover in staff which deprives children of stability and continuity. About 90% of the staff is women, and this deprives the children of male models and "father figures". The staff feels overworked. They would like to reduce adult-child ratio to 1 to 3. The staff is also asking for a boost in image and pay. The staff also feels isolated. They were not satisfied with their pre-service training. There is ideological conflict in the staff. The staff also said that they were prone to fatigue, sickness, and boredom.

There is inadequate coordination between Day Care Centers, the comprehensive schools, the teacher training institutions, the parents, and administrators in charge of Day Care Centers.

The Day Care Staff feels that children spend too much time in the centers and that this may, in fact, be detrimental to their growth and well-being.

A major concern is lack of parental involvement. Parents are either too busy or careless to become more involved. They also see the Day Care Staff as experts and therefore either do not see the need or lack the confidence to deal with the staff. Some parents also feel guilty for abandoning their children at Day Care Centers. Other parents demand too much.

Day Care Staff would like more money for their operation. They would also like to see places available to all children throughout the country. The staff feels ignored and manipulated by politicians. Day Care Centers need to be smaller. They also need personnel for handicapped children who

are being mainstreamed.

A major concern is about the exact goals, role, and functions of Day Care Centers. Is the goal the cognitive, affective,social or physical development of children or what? Are they overschooling when there is talk of deschooling? Are they pre-primary schools? Are they custodial? Is it a conspiracy by the Social Democrats to train communists? How much structure is needed? Are they "child-women ghettos"?

Debate and research on all aspects of pre-school education and socialization continues. Eva Moberg, a wellknown commentator and critic, observes that many children spend as much as 11 hours at the Day Care Centers and that this is detrimental to children in many ways. She states that this is exhausting for the children and that it isolates them from their parents. Children need warm, affectionate, and dependable contact with their parents. The Day-Nursery Commission in its 1971 report underscores parent-child relationship. It is said that the existing contacts are minimal and stressful since both parents and children are tired. Moberg and many others point to the absence of fathers from the home. Many Swedes advocate 6-hour working days with full pay both for fathers and mothers.

Many Swedes are anxious to go beyond the day care centers. Sjostrand (1971) and Karre (1972) argue that if we want to raise socially capable people then they must be brought up in diversified communities. These people advocate what they call "Together Centers", which will be collective living environments for 75-150 people of all ages and backgrounds. These planned and state subsidized communities will be self-managed and fully equipped to meet everyone's needs. Given Sweden's commitment to welfare activities and the already obvious benefits of pre-school education and socialization, there is no question that the prospects are even brighter. As it is, we in the U.S. have much to learn from Sweden.

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